



What Is Organic Food?

Source: By Steve Meyerowitz www.sproutman.com

You could say that the simple definition of organic, both the food and the farming system, is that it's antichemical. It's true that organic farmers must keep their plants, soil and water free of chemicals. But in order for them to put the organic label on their vegetables, quite a number of other conditions must be met. And you can bet that organic farmers do a lot more than just omitting pesticides.

The life of an organic farmer is filled with detailed record keeping, testing and retesting, and surprise inspections. Organic farmers must meet strict standards and reveal their books whenever inspectors inquire. The land must also be free of chemical residues for a minimum of three years. No sewage sludge for fertilizer, no growth hormones or antibiotics are allowed. It's no easy game, especially in these times when genetically modified organisms and pesticide sprays may be flying downwind. Even after organic food leaves the farm, the records must demonstrate that it was transported without ever mingling with non-organic food and that the packaging was not tainted, treated, or irradiated. It's not easy.

But there's more. Organic food and organic farming represent a philosophy that goes beyond just the quality of food. It strives to maintain the integrity of the entire food chain—plants, soil, air, water, animals, and people. We are all part of the same ecosystem. Food does not come from supermarkets. It is only displayed there. Food comes from the land and from the animals living on the land. Fertile land grows healthier plants for healthier animals and healthier people. Organic farmers aspire to manage all these elements harmoniously. They are convinced that nutritious vegetation can be produced only by putting back into the soil what was taken out and that "green" (economically sound) manures and compost do a better job of that than synthetic fertilizers. In their view, crops grown under organic methods are sufficiently pest- and disease-resistant

without the use of chemicals, and the risks of chemicals in agriculture far outweigh the advantages.

Organic farmers believe that although pesticides produce abundant amounts of low-cost food, they create higher costs in other sectors of society. The food is cheap, but the cleanup is exorbitant. Consumers may save at the supermarket, but they lose these savings through tax dollars, agribusiness subsidies, and superfunds — all necessary to correct the results of chemical-based agriculture. The time, expense, and trouble devoted to restoring clean air, water, and soil — in this generation and the next — is greater than any advantages pesticides provide. Not only that, organic farmers argue that because rising demand from consumers is driving prices downward, organic products can better compete against conventional production.

At heart, organic farmers are stewards of the land and managers of sustainable agriculture. This means they want the land to be viable for growing food for future generations. The small family farm, once the foundation of American society, is threatened with extinction. Whole industries such as steel, textile, and mining have disappeared from North America. They have become imports. Will wholesome food become another imported product? Organic farmers, and all promoters of sustainable agriculture, want to prevent our children from inheriting a planet in crisis with toxic waste and global warming. Instead they want to create a legacy of fertile land that will produce healthy food for future generations.

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